

The B.Ed. Internship Programme: Through the Eyes of the Practicing Schools

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Abstract

Internship or Practice Teaching, is an important aspect of the B.Ed. programme, that provides the ground for converting theoretical knowledge into practice. The introduction of the Two-Year B.Ed. programme in India, by the NCTE in 2014, had increased the duration of the Internship programme to 20 weeks, of which 16 weeks was for Internship in Practicing Schools. The scope of the Internship programme was also significantly enhanced. But while the engagement of schools for Practice Teaching, had been one of the major problems even under the 1-Year B.Ed. programme, the increased duration would, without doubt, aggravate the problem. While research on Teacher Education has, over the years, studied problems pertaining to Practice Teaching/Internship, from the perspective of Teacher Education Institutions, student teachers and teacher educators, limited studies have taken the perspectives of the Practicing Schools, though some of the major identified problems pertaining to Practice Teaching/Internship, are related to the Practicing Schools. Hence, this study has focused on the problems of Internship/Practice Teaching, from the point of view of the Practicing Schools identified by Secondary Teacher Education Institutions, in the state of Nagaland, India.

Keywords: Internship, Practice Teaching, Practicing Schools, STEIs, Teacher- Coordinators, Supervision.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The B.Ed. degree course is a professional programme that prepares prospective teachers for entry into the teaching profession. As in the case of other professional courses like Medicine, Engineering, Law, etc., the B.Ed. course too has an Internship component, which gives prospective teachers a practical base to the theory courses offered in the programme. Despite its vital importance in the preparation of teachers, the Internship, or Practice Teaching as it is often referred to, has remained a rather poor link in the B.Ed. course. These shortfalls have often been in relation to the short duration of the programme, lack of coordination between Practicing Schools and the Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs), poor monitoring and supervision, unavailability or unwillingness of schools to accommodate the student teachers, among many others.

Emphasising on the pivotal role of Practicing Schools in Teacher Education, the Kothari Commission (1964-66) noted that teacher training institutions need to build strong relations with Practicing Schools and Practice Teaching should be made a comprehensive Internship programme, involving observation of the total working of the school, and active participation in all the professional activities of teachers, both in and out of the classroom. Further, it should be considered as a joint responsibility of the producer, i.e., the TEIs and the users, which are the Schools and the State Departments of Education. The Curriculum Framework for Quality Teacher Education (NCFQTE, 1998), echoed the same concern. The National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE, 2010), too, observed that Practice Teaching, which is the 'most functional part of teacher preparation has suffered severe neglect and dilution in quality' with inadequate mentoring and supervision and lack of sustained engagement with schools. It suggested organisation of the programme in a "Partnership Model" with the school.

The National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), in 2014, increased the duration of the B.Ed. Programme to two years, along with other Teacher Education programmes. With this, the duration of School Internship had been increased to 20 weeks, of which 16 weeks was for Practice Teaching. The Framework envisaged that during the Internship, "a student teacher shall function as a regular teacher and participate in all school activities". But despite the enhancement in duration and scope, it is another issue, as to how Practicing Schools would view and accommodate the enhanced duration as well as the variety of activities and responsibilities that interning student teachers are to be engaged in.

II. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Various research studies reported shortcomings in the Internship/Practice Teaching programme of the Teacher Education courses. Bhatnagar (as cited in NCERT, 1991), noted that Practice Teaching was found to be the weakest link in the Teacher Education programmes at both Elementary and Secondary levels. Mohan (1980) and Rout (2010) reported on the short duration of Practice Teaching as the schools were unwilling to accommodate student teachers for longer period. Srivastava (as cited in Rai, 1991), Rai (1981) and Rout (2010) found that school authorities cut down Practice Teaching to a shorter period and were unwilling to reshuffle the school time-table to the needs of the TEIs. Srivastava (1969) also reported school teachers passing adverse comments on the methods used by student teachers, blaming them for the poor result of the school, and poor involvement of school teachers in giving guidance to student teachers. Mohanty (2009, p.50), observed that the importance school-college coordination has not been equally perceived by the college authorities.

Richards and Farrell (2011, p.52) too emphasized on the importance of establishing good communication channels with Cooperating Teachers in the Practicing Schools to ensure positive and constructive relationship.

Kaur (2011) noted that TEIs found it difficult to get Practicing Schools and also their cooperation in conducting the programme. Azeem (2011), found that heads of Practicing Schools rarely prepared time-tables for student teachers before commencement of Practice Teaching, although most student teachers were offered subjects of their choice. Class teachers of the schools were seldom present during teaching, and hardly guided and encouraged the student teachers.

Ahmad (2016) in his study also found that though some Lessons were supervised and feedback given, many were merely signed by the Supervisors as a token of having been delivered.

In studies conducted on the 2-Year B.Ed. programme, Nayak (2016), found that the Internship Programme was treated as a mere ritual. Supervision and mentoring were also found to be 'cursory and superficial'. Sadapal and Bhusari (2017) suggested that to ensure availability of schools, the intervention of the Government and the School Education Department. Sangha and Bajaj (2017), identified problems related to the duration and demands of the Internship programme, ignorance of schools about changes in the new 2-year B.Ed. course, and failure of B.Ed. colleges to inform and orient them of the same. Kumar and Thapa (2018), reported lack of support from Practicing Schools, problem of creating synergy between schools and Teacher Educators, lack of support and guidance from school mentor teachers, and very low observation and supervision of classes by supervisors and experts.

Gupta (2019), found that 50 per cent of the student teachers faced the problem of non-cooperation from Government School teachers. She suggested that a set of written guidelines about Internship programme should be given to the student teachers and heads of the Practicing Schools so that they may act as per guidelines mentioned in the document and conduct activities in an organised manner.

Despite the recognised problems, there seems to have been a neglect in finding out the problems faced by Practicing Schools, which are envisaged to be co-partners and to play a vital role in the Internship. Studies on the Practice Teaching programme have laid focus only on the perspective of TEIs, teacher educators and student teachers, while leaving out the problems and concerns of the Practicing Schools.

Taking into account the prevailing shortcomings as stated above, it was considered necessary to conduct a study focussing on the problems faced by the Practicing Schools in the State of Nagaland, and the opinions they have on the 2-Year B.Ed. Internship programme, under the Nagaland University. There are nine Secondary TEIs (STEIs) in the State, of which, two are under Government management and the remaining seven, under Private management. These STEIs are spread over three of the 12 Districts of the State. For the current Study however, the Practicing Schools of eight STEIs only, were covered.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study has been undertaken with the following Objectives:

1. To find out the problems faced by Practicing Schools with regard to the Internship Programme of the Two-Year B.Ed. Programme in Nagaland.
2. To find out the views and opinions of Practicing Schools on the conduct of the Internship programme.
3. To suggest measures for addressing the problems faced by Practicing Schools in relation to the B.Ed. Internship programme.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The population taken for the survey consisted of the Heads/Teacher Coordinators of Practicing Schools identified by eight out of nine STEIs in Nagaland. The sample consisted of School Heads/ Teacher Coordinators of 46 out of 75 Practicing Schools spread over three districts, identified by the eight STEIs for Internship. Of the 46 Schools, there were six Schools that had been used by more than one STEI, for Internship. With the Internship Programme scheduled around the same time by all the STEIs, only about 60 per cent of the Practicing Schools identified, could be covered, in each district. The schools were randomly selected from the list of schools provided by each STEI.

The Descriptive Survey Method was used for this study. Semi-Structured Interviews were conducted with the Heads of Schools or with Teacher-Coordinators, wherever they were appointed. The Semi-Structured Interview was considered as the most appropriate tool for collection of data, so as to gain deeper insights into the views and opinions of the interviewees. The interview transcripts were grouped and tabulated. Simple percentages were used as a standard measure of statistics.

V. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The eight STEIs, covered under the present Study, consisted of one in Mokokchung District under Government Management, three in Dimapur under Private Management, and 4 in Kohima, of which one was under Government Management. The categories of schools identified by the STEIs from which the data for the study were collected, are presented in Table: 1, below. (Table-1 to be inserted here)

It was interesting to note that out of the 12 Government schools identified for Practice Teaching, only 16.66 per cent were engaged by one Private STEI, that too, since the student teachers practicing in the schools were In-service student teachers who were employed in the particular schools, and deputed for undergoing B.Ed. Also, student teachers with Post-Graduate degrees Interning in Higher Secondary Schools, were not permitted to teach in the Higher Secondary classes. Almost all schools had allotted Classes Five to Seven for the purpose of Practice Teaching. 13.04 per cent schools were also found to be engaged by two different STEIs for Internship.

The findings of the Interviews conducted with the Heads/Teacher-Coordinators of schools on different aspects of the Internship programme, are presented under the following heads:

a) Views on the enhanced duration of Internship:

With regard to the 16 weeks of Internship, 56.32 per cent respondents were agreeable to the duration, if the timing was changed. However, 30.43 per cent expressed permissibility of a maximum of two to three weeks of Internship, due to concerns of completion of the syllabus. Only 8.69 per cent expressed willingness for the complete duration provided student teachers functioned as regular teachers. 4.34 per cent (Head Teachers of Government Middle Schools), welcomed the extended duration as pupils enjoyed learning with the student teachers. Some (19.56 per cent) were agreeable to the extended duration provided the number of student teachers deputed to the school was limited, and student teachers provided 'notes' to the pupils (19.56 per cent).

Similar findings were reported by Srivastava (1969), Batnagar (1980), Mohan (1980), Rai (1981), and Singha and Bajaj (2017).

b) Orientation and information given by STEIs on the New B.Ed. Curriculum and requirements of the Internship Programme:

Out of the eight STEIs, only one Government institution in Kohima, had conducted an orientation for the Heads/Coordinators of Practicing Schools, on the changes in the New B.Ed. Curriculum, change in the approach to teaching, and the requirements of the Internship programme, and had also sent out written Information on the changes, and the requirements that Student teachers had to fulfil. However, of the 13 Practicing Schools identified by the said STEI, Heads/Teacher-Coordinators of eight schools only, had attended the orientation.

It was interesting to find that the remaining 87.5 per cent STEIs had not informed the Practicing Schools of the changes. In the event, 45.65 per cent respondents specifically denied having any knowledge about changes in the B.Ed. curriculum and necessary requirements, thereof.

In addition, it was also found that most STEIs failed to give any official information to the Practicing Schools, seeking permission for the Internship, while 16.66 per cent STEIs left the student teachers to themselves to organise the programme on their own.

The findings are indicative of the lack of coordination between the school and STEIs which was also reported by Mohan (1980), Bhatnagar (1980) and Sangha and Bajaj (2017).

c) Suitability of timing of Internship Programme:

The Internship Programme had been scheduled between the months of August and October (3rd. Semester) by all the STEIs. On this, all respondents suggested that the Internship should be in the beginning part of the year, since Schools face shortage of teachers due to resignations of teachers, engagement in Board

Examination related works and lesser pressure of syllabus coverage and preparation for examination, as compared to the later part.

17.37 per cent of the respondents also stated that Internship be for one full term (in between two assessment periods), for the reason that student teachers could cover the full syllabus for the term, and conduct evaluation for the same period.

d) Nature of classroom transaction as per the Constructivist Approach:

On the New Approach, 28.26 per cent felt that the classes were highly interactive and that pupils were constantly engaged, and hence, the approach was good. Of these, 10.86 per cent of school heads had encouraged the regular teachers to observe classes of the student teachers. Other observations shared, included - classes "not as expected" (28.26 per cent), no difference observed between the Old and the New Approaches (30.43 per cent), and that the New Approach caused 'indiscipline' in the class (15.21 per cent).

Respondents were also of the opinion that not all student teachers used the New Approach in teaching (15.21 per cent), lacked confidence in using the approach (19.56 per cent), and that some taught without Lesson Plans and proper preparation (19.56 per cent).

e) Accommodation of classes of Student Teachers in the regular School Time-Table:

It was found that 30.43 per cent schools had prepared a common school time-table inclusive of the classes of the B.Ed. student teachers. In 52.17 per cent schools, time-table was made separately for only the student teachers, but changes took place without prior notice (26 per cent).

In 8.69 per cent schools, student teachers were given only proxy classes, while in another 8.69 per cent, student teachers were only informed verbally about classes allotted to them, a day ahead.

It was interesting to note that in 4.34 per cent schools, student teachers were given only proxy classes, where they were made to teach whichever subject, the proxy was for.

Student teachers with Science and Mathematics pedagogy were more likely to get classes on a daily basis, as compared to those with Language and Social Sciences pedagogies, since there were more student teachers with these specialisations as compared to Mathematics and Science.

Similar problems were found in the findings by other researchers- Srinivas (1969), Rai (1981) and Rout (2010), who reported unwillingness by the schools to reshuffle the time table to the needs of the STEIs. Azeem (2011) reported that heads of schools rarely prepared time- tables for the student teachers.

f) Views on engaging Student Teachers in activities and responsibilities other than Classroom Teaching:

Only 26.08 per cent of Practicing Schools were willing to engage student teachers in activities as per the systems

and practices of the school. 30.43 per cent expressed willingness to engage, but did not do so, without prior information from the STEIs. 19.56 per cent had assigned student teachers with certain responsibilities, though not informed by the STEIs, and 15.21 per cent were willing to engage, but under guidance of regular teachers only.

In the schools where student teachers were engaged, the areas included- conducting and presenting talks and special numbers during school assemblies, engaging pupils during free classes, and assisting regular teachers in organising school programmes.

In 10.86 per cent schools, student teachers with past experience were engaged in invigilation duties. Only one school had allowed student teachers to observe the school staff meeting. It was concluded from the views of the school heads that they were apprehensive of the competencies of the student teachers in taking responsibilities in the school during the period of Internship.

Similar findings were also reported by Gupta (2019).

g) *Involvement of either Teacher-Coordinators or Heads of Schools in Supervision, Monitoring and Assessment of Student Teachers:*

It was found that the Practicing Schools of seven out of eight STEIs had not been informed of the changes in the assessment criteria. Two STEIs had also not supplied any format for assessment, nor were the schools informed of the need for assessment. The Heads/Teacher-Coordinators of 63.04 per cent schools were unaware of the new approach to teaching and assessment and hence their assessments were based on the criteria used in the past.

Teacher-Coordinators in 19.56 per cent Schools did supervise and monitor the student teachers but without any assessment or feedback. Heads/Teachers-Coordinators of 17.39 per cent schools only were aware of the nature of assessment to be done and did so, accordingly. These findings were in consonance with the findings of Srivastava (1969), Azeem (2011), and Kumar and Thapa (2018).

h) *Views on Supervision and Monitoring by Teacher Educators of STEIs:*

The Study found that in 32.60 per cent schools, no supervisors from the STEIs visited the student teachers to supervise their classes and other activities, while in 13.04 per cent schools, teacher educators visited, but did not supervise the classes. In 47.82 per cent schools, supervisors visited approximately once a week, but only few classes were supervised. Similar findings were also reported by Nayak (2016), Sangha and Bajaj (2017), and Kumar and Thapa (2018). The Practicing School Heads were all synonymous on the view that regular/more Supervision from the STEIs was required.

i) *Other Problems:*

Some other problems shared by the Heads/Teacher-Coordinators of Practicing Schools were-unwillingness

of regular teachers to give their classes to the student teachers for fear of non-completion of syllabus (28.26 per cent), and apprehensions about the effectiveness of the new approach (15.21 per cent); complaints from parents of pupils about student teachers not providing 'notes' (15.21 per cent); apprehensions that longer duration of Internship would leave regular teachers without classes to teach (13.04 per cent); and fear of compromising with quality since regular teachers had better experience (15.21 per cent). Heads of four (8.69 per cent) schools where student teachers from one Government STEI and one Private STEI were interning, voiced that student teachers from the Private STEIs were only "fulfilling a formality" but those from the Government STEI were "good/performing well". Also, 36.95 per cent respondents were of the view that without regular and proper Supervision from the STEIs, student teachers were not serious about the Internship programme. With lack of information/clear information from the STEIs, the Internship programme was just a waste of time (21.73 per cent).

VI. SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

It is indeed a foregone fact that the Internship programme, which involves a considerably deep immersion of student teachers in the total working of the schools, and in which the regular teachers help to mentor and guide the student teachers, would necessarily be possible only if the schools appreciate and accommodate the requirements of the programme. This however, does not seem to be the case, as seen through the findings of this study and of researches in Teacher Education, over the years.

On the basis of the findings of this study, it may be inferred that Internship as an integral part of the B.Ed. programme appears to have fallen far behind expectation in the way of preparing student teachers for the teaching profession. The duration of the Internship prescribed the NCTE (2014) appeared to have been a failure as schools were not willing to give their classes for the long duration as was also found by Mohan (1980) and Rout (2010).

There appears to have been no proper communication, co-ordination, between the STEIs and Heads of Schools, who were supposed to be the supporting force for successful implementation of the Internship programme. There is total negligence on the part of the Principals of STEIs in building mutual trust with the schools.

The schools were found to be reluctant to accommodate student teachers in the regular school time table, which could have had a negative impact in the overall activities expected of them. Allotting classes on the spot without prior information and offering proxy classes would surely dampen the spirit of the student teachers.

Absence of proper supervision and monitoring from the STEIs was another reason for unwillingness to give classes by the Schools as well as discouraging for student teachers, giving them little room for improvement.

Based on the findings, the following measures are suggested:

1. Teacher Education should be recognised as a shared responsibility of all stakeholders - TEIs, schools, the University, and the State Departments of Education at all levels.
2. Curriculum Frameworks for School and Teacher Education should be developed in consonance so as to bring in systematic and co-ordinated changes, and avoid gaps in implementation.
3. Incentives may be given to the Practicing Schools by the School Education Department, for co-partnering in the teacher preparation process.
4. Trust and confidence building measures need to be adopted between the STEIs and Practicing Schools. Mutual understanding and appreciation of problems and collectively finding solutions to them can help in overcoming many of the challenges.
5. Initiatives such as free extension services by the STEIs to the Practicing Schools while also inviting experienced teachers from the schools for orienting student teachers on various practical aspects of teaching, could go a long way in establishing closer linkages between the two.
6. Practicing Schools may be adopted as mentee schools by the STEIs on a rotational basis helping and assisting them in academic, organisational and management aspects.
7. The final semester of the B.Ed. Programme (scheduled in the first part of the year) may be totally left for Internship, wherein student teachers may be engaged, initially for working as apprentices under regular teachers in the Schools, followed by engaging in actual teaching and independently taking up responsibilities in activities required of them.
8. Shortage of faculty in the STEIs being one of the reasons for insufficient monitoring and supervision of student teachers during Internship, strengthening faculty positions in the STEIs should be a priority of the Institutional Management and the State Department of Higher Education.
9. A Monitoring and Regulating Agency should be constituted at the State level to oversee the proper and uniform implementation of different aspects of the Teacher Education Programme.
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It may be concluded that only when the problems encountered by the schools are identified, can efforts towards resolving the same, be initiated. Hence, it would not be wrong to suggest that, in addition to the measures suggested, more research on Practicing Schools and their problems, need to be undertaken, and STEIs need to make efforts and adopt strategies to resolve the misconceptions, negative attitude and problems faced by Practicing Schools with regard to the Internship. Only then, can the Internship/Practice Teaching programme be effectively implemented and the B.Ed. programme, able to achieve its objectives.

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